

Board of County Commissioners Agenda Request 21

Date of Meeting: April 26, 2005
Date Submitted: April 20, 2005

To: Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board
From: Parwez Alam, County Administrator
Vincent Long, Assistant County Administrator
Subject: Consideration of Public Information Initiatives

Statement of Issue:

This item seeks Board consideration of several County public information initiatives consistent with the Leon County Strategic Communications Plan, adopted by the Board on January 25, 2005 (Attachment #1).

Background:

The goal of the Public Information Office (PIO) is to develop and maintain a continuous positive image of Leon County government by fostering proactive and responsive communication with the public. To help in achieving this goal, a Strategic Communications Plan was developed and approved by the Board on January 25, 2005. This item informs the Board of, and seeks specific approval on, pursuing several key public information initiatives.

Analysis:

The PIO is responsible for public information and education, communications strategy and message development, media and public relations, and the marketing of County programs and services. The PIO uses communication tools to educate the public, including:

- the County website
- distribution of news releases
- news advisories and notices to the media
- press conferences
- The County Link (monthly newspaper advertisement)
- the County government TV channel
- speaking engagements
- neighborhood and community meetings
- special events
- numerous publications to the public
- regular reports to the Board

Internal communication tools include: the distribution of a quarterly employee newsletter, Intranet (internal) Website, and other forms of communication.

The Strategic Communications Plan outlines several public information initiatives to enhance the overall communication effectiveness of Leon County government, many of which are ongoing. Specific enhancements to County public information efforts are presented in this item for Board consideration.

Channel 16

Leon County's franchise agreement with Comcast allows County access to cable Channel 16 every Tuesday from 9 a.m. until midnight. The channel serves as a valuable, effective, but under-utilized communication tool to educate the public on important information about County services. The Strategic Communications Plan puts a strong emphasis on the increased utilization of Channel 16. Currently, Board workshops and regular meetings are broadcast live on Channel 16. In addition, the County displays a message board that provides Commissioners' contact information, job announcements, and information regarding County services, programs, and events. Beginning in March 2005, equipment enhancements enabled Board meetings to be replayed on Channel 16 immediately following the live meeting, and on Tuesdays when the Board does not meet. The new equipment also allows the County to build its television programming.

In January 2004, the PIO contracted with a video production vendor to produce a 30-minute video on the County's new EMS service. The Strategic Communications Plan recommends production of additional videos to promote County services and educate the public on County projects. These three to five minute, news-like packages will feature interviews with Commissioners, staff, and community leaders, in segments designed to introduce and update citizens on County issues. Staff recommends producing one to two videos each month to air on Channel 16. Board meetings will be replayed along with the informational videos every Tuesday, from 9 a.m. until midnight, when there is not a live Board meeting. The PIO will provide a recommended production schedule for approval by the Board each quarter. The PIO recommends the following videos for the spring quarter:

<p>April June 2005</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Emergency Medical Services (Update existing video with new information; Introduce new EMS chief). ■ Orange Avenue Expansion Project ■ Killearn Lakes Sewer Project ■ Growth and Environmental Permitting Changes ■ Solid Waste Service (Improvements at landfill and success of Transfer Station)
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In addition, the PIO will produce public service announcements (PSA's) about County services as needed (i.e.: mosquito control season, volunteer opportunities, etc). A video will also be produced in the fall to coincide with the release of the County Administrator's Annual Report to the Board that will highlight the County's projects over the past fiscal year. The videos will be funded from the PIO promotional budget.

Public Meetings/Public Events

In recent years, the Board has held district-wide community meetings in the fall to educate the public on County-wide and district-specific issues of importance. Overall, attendance at these meetings has been very low. The Strategic Communications Plan calls for the elimination of this practice and recommends that the County, instead, conduct a community/town hall meeting to communicate with the public on an issue(s) specific basis and develop an effective public education program around this event.

In addition, the Strategic Communications Plan calls for hosting a fun, family-oriented event, called "Leon County Citizens Appreciation Day." The County would provide food, family activities, children's games, and displays of Leon County department and division services, increasing awareness and allowing Commissioners and staff an opportunity to personally meet and greet citizens. Staff will agenda this year's Citizen Appreciation Day for Board input and consideration in the coming months.

Branding

The Board uses the Leon County seal as its official image on letterhead and other materials. This seal currently has the image of the State of Florida. The color version is brown and green. The County's color has unofficially been green. It is important for the public to identify Leon County government with a consistent image. The PIO recommends branding new colors, navy and gold, and have the County seal reflect these colors (Attachment #2). To avoid confusion in the eyes of the public, and to promote the County's identity, all external publications, as well as promotional materials, should use these colors when possible, and clearly identify the source of the document with the new County seal.

In addition, staff has enhanced the County's official letterhead with a more updated and reader-friendly look by changing the font, increasing the font size, and leaving an area that allows departments and divisions to add their respective contact information (Attachment #3).

Leon County Public Information (Rotunda)

The PIO staff includes an Information Desk Coordinator position, currently funded at 30 hours a week. The position's job description includes: providing customer service to Courthouse visitors, answering questions from visitors and directing them to the proper location, supervising staff of volunteers, and answering incoming calls from departments within the Courthouse or citizens. The person in this position is retiring at the end of April.

Staff recommends expanding the Information Desk Coordinator position to a 40-hour, full-time equivalency, effective May 1, 2005. The salary range for this position is \$21,951.53 to \$35,004.90. The total financial impact is \$5,207. If approved, the Coordinator's job will be enhanced to realize a more professional public information presence at the information desk. The Coordinator would serve as the first point of contact for Courthouse visitors and callers to the County Public Information line. The Coordinator would carry out the mission of the PIO, by having constant communication and interaction with the public, being a valuable asset in promoting Leon County government services.

Staff is also working to secure a dedicated phone line for the Rotunda information desk to establish a "488-LEON" phone number. The PIO will promote this number as the official Leon County Board of County Commissioners Public Information telephone number and the Information Desk Coordinator would handle the incoming calls from this line and respond to callers' questions and concerns.

Options:

1. Approve Public Information Initiative regarding Channel 16 television programming.
2. Approve Public Information Initiative regarding new County colors.
3. Approve reclassification of the Information Desk Coordinator to a 40-hour, full-time equivalent position.
4. Do not approve Public Information Initiatives.
5. Board Direction

Recommendation:

Options #1, #2, and #3.

Attachments:

1. Strategic Communications Plan
2. Proposed Revised County Seal
3. Proposed Revised County Letterhead

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